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**ANIMAL ISSUES TASK FORCE**
**Monday, May 21, 2012**
**6:00 p.m.**
**4th Floor Conference Room – Busch Municipal Building**

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**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Mary Collette, Chairwoman; Gwen Evans, Alicia Mathis, Randall Voss, Carrie Galvan, Janet Martin, Kathleen Cowens, Dr. Rita Wittu, Carl Woodland, Cindy Larson, Dr. Michael Stafford.

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Christian Mechlin.

**STAFF PRESENT:** Clay Goddard, Mike Brothers, and Karen Prescott, Health Department.

**GUESTS:** Jim Swain, Citizen; Mary Crawford, SAAFhouse Spay and Neuter Clinic; and Casey Gaines, BSRO.

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Chairwoman Mary Collette called the meeting to order at approximately 6 p.m. The group reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting on April 23, 2012.

Randall Voss motioned to approve the minutes. Gwen Evans seconded. The minutes were approved.

Chairwoman Collette reviewed the official charge given to the group by City Council, which states that the group is to examine "animal shelter facilities, policies and procedures and recommend any changes that would improve the level and quality of services from the standpoint of public safety and animal welfare." Any issues that come up in discussion should fall under those topics, she said. She said the group's recommendations should include the types of things the city is doing or not doing, and include what they would consider to be "best case" scenarios.

Assistant Director of Health Clay Goddard introduced himself to the group, noting that he has been involved in the public health field for 16 years. Several years ago, he was tasked by Health Director Kevin Gipson to improve the animal control program. He said the program has come a long way, but animal control issues are complex and the improvements are still continuing.

Mr. Goddard noted one "housekeeping" item from the last meeting: the issue of data discrepancies in some older data provided to the group at its last meeting. These include numbers of animals that don't always match up one-to-one when comparing in-take to disposition. Mr. Goddard explained this is likely because all record keeping was done by hand on paper for many years, prior to the purchase and installation of a software system called Shelter Pro in 2010. Record keeping was among the many things that needed improving in this program, he said.

Mr. Goddard then began a presentation that he said was a "10,000 foot view" of how the animal control program works, the "model" it uses, and how other models work.

First, Mr. Goddard noted the requirements of animal control under state and local law. These include:

- Required to hold stray dogs for 5 days and the hold period must include a weekend.
- Required to keep stray cats 72 hours.

- Required to hold any dog pursuant of a court order pending hearing. Often this is related to dogs that are considered as vicious or nuisance dogs.
- Required to hold animals when owners are arrested, involved in accident or dead (until next of kin can be located).
- Required to free and hold animals trapped in cars.
- Required to enforce rabies vaccination and display of rabies tag.
- Required pickup and impound dogs running at large.
- Required to administer rabies quarantine for biting animals.

Regarding the third bullet above, Mr. Goddard noted that occasionally animal control will be asked to take possession of a dog deemed vicious from a crime scene or after the arrest of a person who is taken to jail. Alicia Mathis asked if such a person would be required to pay for boarding. Mr. Goddard said it usually depends on the current population of the shelter.

Next, Mr. Goddard discussed where the animals in the shelter typically come from. There are two main sources: enforcement of laws by officers, and owner turn-in. Enforcement of the laws listed above is the driving force behind the first factor. Pet ownership and local culture are behind the second, Mr. Goddard said.

The implementation of a $20 fee for owner-turn-ins has reduced the amount of animals coming to the shelter, especially cats. Dogs are down just slightly. Before this fee was instituted on July 1, 2010, there was not a charge to turn in. In fact, citizens could call animal control about an animal, and an officer would then drive to the residence, pick up the animal and take it to the shelter – all for free. This created a culture of easy riddance of unwanted animals, Mr. Goddard said, and often added to an already bad situation when it came to the local animal population.

Some of the factors that Mr. Goddard said affect the number of animals coming to the shelter include: the fees for turn-in, the cost of fines for repeat animal violations and the state of the economy.

Next, Mr. Goddard discussed where the animals go after they are taken in. The term used for this outflow is "disposition." Under Springfield's current model, there are three outcomes. Animals either go to a rescue agency for public adoption, are claimed by their proper owner, or euthanized. Factors influencing disposition include: available space at rescue agencies, health of the animal, the identification process, the city's current pit bull policy, and fees and fines.

Next, Mr. Goddard discussed some of the various differing models used in other communities.

The first model discussed was the contract kennel model. This model is currently being used by both Joplin and Columbia/Boone County. Mr. Goddard noted that animal control is not always under the purview of local health authorities as it is in Springfield. In both Joplin and Columbia/Boone County, it is under the local health department. In both communities, the contracting agency is the local Humane Society.

In Joplin, the contract is set up in an "a la carte" fashion, Mr. Goddard said. This means that the City of Joplin pays the Humane Society a fee per animal that varies depending on what services are provided for each animal during the process. These may include spay/neuter, grooming, adoption services, and vaccinations, etc. In Columbia/Boone County, the animal control program leases space in the Humane Society's facility to do the work required by law, and then hand over the animals to the Humane Society for further processing and disposition.

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A hybrid of the current Springfield model and the contract model was briefly discussed. In this model, animals would come to a city-operated shelter and some would continue to go either back to owners directly from the city facility or to select rescue groups. The remaining animals would go to a contract kennel that for public adoptions or euthanasia

Next, the system used in Calgary, Ontario, Canada, was discussed. Mr. Goddard said he believes such a model to be the "gold standard" for local animal control programs. However, he also noted that the culture of Calgary is likely very different than the culture of Springfield, Missouri. Therefore, it likely would not be possible to replicate such a program here. Regardless, this program does represent a "best practice" for dealing with animal populations.

In Calgary, the focus is on responsible pet ownership, and this concept is enforced by law. The laws are based on four principles.

First is the licensing and identification of pets. All dogs and cats three months of age or older are required to be licensed. Responsible pet ownership is encouraged by graduated fees for animals that are spayed and/or neutered (or altered). Annual licensing fees are $36 for an altered dog and $58 for an unaltered one. The fees are $15 for altered cats and $30 for unaltered.

Second: spay/neuter services are provided at no cost to low-income individuals who cannot pay for the procedures themselves. Third: training, medical care, socialization and physical care are provided to all animals that need it. Fourth: do not allow pets to become a threat to the community. This is accomplished via enforcement of animal control laws.

In 2010, Calgary saw 4,330 dogs impounded. About 86 percent were returned to their owner. Of those, about two third were picked up by their owner and the other third were driven directly home by animal control officers. Calgary has a metro population of about 1.1 million people. Springfield has about 151,100 and in contrast saw 2,123 dogs impounded in 2011 and had an owner return rate of about 23 percent. About 869 cats were impounded in Calgary in 2010, and more than half were returned to their owner. Springfield's 2011 cat numbers are 547 impounded and just 11 claimed by owner. Calgary's high return rate can be attributed to the requirement that all animals be licensed and tagged with identification as requirement of licensing. Just 5 percent of dogs and about 18 percent of cats are euthanized in Calgary.

The penalties for non-compliance are stiff. There is a $250 fine. The estimated success rate for licensing is about 90 percent for dogs and 50 percent for cats. Carrie Galvan asked about the compliance rate for the Springfield pit bull ordinance. Mr. Goddard said it is difficult to know how many dogs exist in order to calculate the rate, but he noted that there are currently 279 pit bulls registered. Several members of the group said they felt it was likely that many more pit pulls than that are in Springfield.

The group discussed the issues surrounding any possible licensing requirements in Springfield. Outside of the pit bull law, Springfield has not required pet licensing since 1978. At that time, city leaders decided to end licensing (among other fees) as a result of voter approval of the permanent 1-cent general sales tax that provides revenue for the city's General Fund today. Mr. Goddard said Joplin and Columbia require pet licensing. These operations do not always pay for themselves, but instead are a method to encourage responsible pet ownership. Chairwoman Collette said she believes "timing is everything" and that the community may be ready for a conversation about licensing. She said pilot programs could be instituted before full programs. The City of Republic also has a license requirement.

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Finally, Mr. Goddard discussed the current model used in St. Louis County. It recently used $5 million to renovate a 26,000 square foot former carpet warehouse facility into a new shelter with more than 600 kennel spaces. The county employs two full-time veterinarians, one to perform spay/neuter services and one to provide general health care. It employs 15 full-time animal control officers to cover 92 municipalities across the county. Funding for the program comes from a dedicated property tax of 0.1 cents on $100 of assessed value.

St. Louis County has a euthanasia rate of about 46 percent. Mr. Goddard noted that Springfield's rate is about 20 percent overall. He noted that this was a result of quality work by both animal control staff and the local rescue organizations with which they work.

Mr. Goddard concluded his formal presentation.

Members of the group request more information about the contracts, funding mechanisms, budgets and citizen requirements in Joplin, Columbia/Boone County, St. Joseph and Republic. Chairwoman Collette mentioned that the city-owned incineration facility in St. Joseph is a revenue source.

Ms. Evans noted that a city-operated pound benefits all citizens of a community, even those who do not own or even like dogs and cats.

Chairwoman Collette said licensing helps pay for services that benefit the community. She believes the community must have collective "skin in the game" in order to address the issues surrounding animal controls.

Several members said a licensing fee to be required once per the lifetime of an animal, rather than annually, could be examined.

Chairwoman Collette requested information about the methods each community mentioned above uses to euthanize animals, and the costs associated with each.

Alicia Mathis asked about information Dr. Mike Stafford requested of the Humane Society in an e-mail between the April 23 meeting and this meeting. Those were:

- Number of intake animals in 2011 dogs and cats
- Maximum capacity for both dogs and cats.
- Average daily animal totals for both dogs and cats
- Number of animals euthanized (dogs and cats) in 2011 broken down to adoptable and non-adoptable
- Number of animals adopted in 2011 dogs and cats
- Number of animals that went to rescue groups in 2011 dogs and cats
- Maximum allowable daily intake for dogs and cats
- Number of isolation cages available
- Estimated fee the HS would need to provide care and services for the City dogs and cats, would it be a per-animal fee or a daily fee?

Mr. Voss said the answers will likely be forthcoming by the next meeting. He noted that the Humane Society has recently had a change in administration.

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Next, the group discussed a letter sent to the Mayor and City Council from the United States Postal Service and the local postmaster requesting a dialog on vicious dogs and animals biting letter carriers. The group determined that such discussions would be outside of its charge.

Chairwoman Collette said that she hoped any broad-based policies that may come about as a result of the group's work might be able to help with such issues over time. The group requested Mr. Goddard draft a memo on behalf of the task force to City Council saying the issue was beyond its charge.

Mr. Goddard request that group members take a tour of the animal shelter and ride along with an animal control officer if they have not done so already.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:10 p.m.